

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Fish Advisory Announced Today For Potomac River Tributaries Near Quantico**

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health is advising the public that channel catfish larger than 18 inches caught in tidal areas in several tributaries flowing into the Potomac River near Quantico may be contaminated with PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, at levels which may pose a potential public health risk.

The advisory is directed toward recreational fishermen who may frequently eat large channel catfish. Commercial fishermen are not affected by this advisory.

In recent sampling by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, channel catfish taken from Chopawamsic, Quantico and Powells creeks and Quantico Embayment showed PCB levels above the health department guideline of 600 ppb (parts per billion). Affected tidal waters in Virginia stretch approximately 33 miles from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge to Brent Point at the mouth of Aquia Creek. Fish in Aquia Creek were not tested and are not included in the advisory.

The Maryland Department of the Environment is issuing a similar advisory today for a corresponding section of the Potomac River between the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and Smith Point, Md.

“People should eat no more than one eight-ounce meal per month of channel catfish larger than 18 inches from the affected waters,” according to Khizar Wasti, Ph.D., Director of the Virginia Department of Health’s Division of Health Hazards Control. “The meal estimate is based on the possibility that eating PCB-contaminated fish may increase the lifetime risk of cancer in humans,” Wasti said.

Although no recent data supports a formal advisory against eating large eel and carp, the health department cautions against consuming too many of these fish caught in the affected waters, because the feeding habits of carp and eel are similar to those of channel catfish. Smaller channel catfish and other species are not affected by the advisory.

The potential for PCBs to cause cancer in humans is based on studies in experimental animals. A link between occupational exposure to PCBs and cancer in humans has not been proven. No immediate health effects are known to exist in humans who eat PCB-contaminated fish.

(more)

PCBs are a group of man-made industrial chemicals that exist as a mixture and may contain up to 209 individual compounds. Since 1977, PCBs have not been produced in the U.S., but they are still found in the environment. PCBs were once widely used as coolants and lubricants in transformers, capacitors and other electrical equipment.

The Virginia Department of Health recommends the following precautions, Wasti said, to reduce any potential harmful effects:

- Eat the smaller, younger fish (within the legal limits). They are less likely to contain harmful levels of PCBs than larger, older fish.
- Remove the skin, fat (from the belly and top of the fish) and internal organs where PCBs are most likely to accumulate before cooking the fish.
- Bake, broil or grill on an open rack to allow fats to drain away from the meat.
- Discard the fats that cook out of the fish.
- Avoid or reduce the amount of fish drippings or broth that are used to flavor the meal. These drippings may contain higher levels of PCBs.
- Eat less deep fried fish, since frying seals PCBs into the fatty tissue.

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